1997: EPA brokers $80 million deal to save Bolsa Chica, Southern California's largest remaining tidal marsh. EPA Administrator tank owners face deadline to upgrade tanks to prevent leaks. Superfund Emergency Response Program reports 420 emergency

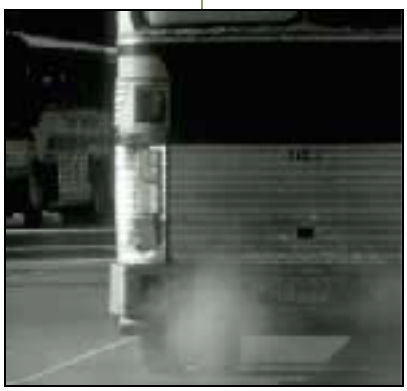
FUTURE CHALLENGES

Environmental protection gets more complex

While this report documents major progress toward environmental protection during 1999, we think it's wise to end on a cautionary note: because EPA and other agencies have helped clean up many of the centralized sources of pollution, we're left with a wider array of problems for which there is no easy solution.

Most of these problems can be characterized as diffuse, persistent and pervasive. For example, when it comes to air pollution, the new enemy is rarely a single smokestack; it's air and dust pollution produced by millions of sources – from cars to vacant lots – spread throughout vast metropolitan areas. When the issue is toxics, the enemy is not just concentrated Superfund sites, but tenacious and multi-sourced poisons like mercury and dioxin. When the problem is water pollution, the concern is no longer a big sewage plant, but millions of storm drains or logging roads, which flush a bouillabaisse of pollutants into fragile rivers, lakes and estuaries.

Among the top problems EPA sees today and on the horizon in the Pacific Southwest are air toxics and the lung-damaging pollution of diesel engines, non-point sources of water pollution, habitat and watershed destruction, tricky water contaminants like MTBE and perchlorate (which is a component of rocket fuel), cancer-causing chemicals like dioxins and other PBTs – persistent-bioaccumlative toxins – which can move up the food chain through fish, fowl and people, and the large volume of pesticides used to produce American food. Other challenges requiring study and science include endocrine disruptors and genetically altered food.



Diesel fumes and air toxics pose a major public health challenge.

In addition to these relatively new problems, we have plenty of work yet to do in the "traditional environmental protection arena – especially along the U.S.-Mexico border, on tribal lands and in low income communities. We are catching up with work that should have been done years ago and will require many more years of intensive effort. There are Superfund sites still to be reclaimed. We have only begun to prepare watershed recovery and pollution prevention plans – known as Total Maximum Daily Loads – although the Clean Water Act envisioned their implementation years ago. Wetlands are still disappearing, ecosystems are

Carol Browner forms Office of Children's Health Protection. 1998: EPA announces Clean Water Action Plan. Underground fuel cleanups completed since 1981 at sites posing an imminent threat to human health or the environment. 1999: Toxic releases in

failing, and we are still striving with our partners to bring closure to a series of complex negotiations – such as CALFED, the process to help solve California's water wars.

The same concern – the feeling that we're playing catch-up – also applies to our enforcement work. Even though 1999 was a record enforcement year, we know we have only addressed the tip of the iceberg in enforcing environmental laws on the books. And even if all of these laws were enforced perfectly, we know that significant environmental and public health risks would remain since the law represents a nationally-set minimum level of protection, not necessarily the very best environmental outcome.

That's a key reason why EPA has set up more than a score of programs to help business and industry clean up their act and attain superior outcomes – programs like Project XL, Waste Wi$e, Energy Star Building, and Water Alliances for Voluntary Efficiency. It's the reason behind EPA grants to help California dairy operators control their waste streams before they ruin water supplies. It's the reason for EPA partnerships for pollution prevention, whether it's working with metal platers to cut their use of toxic solvents or supporting communities in their quest to design new developments that – because they require less driving and have fewer paved surfaces – generate less air pollution and polluted water run-off up front. And it's why we've launched a green energy program and transformed our Richmond, CA laboratory into the first federal government facility using 100% renewable energy.

Because as America confronts a new set of environmental challenges – from the broad-scale threat of global warming to the pin-point toxicity of dioxin – EPA will need all the help and ingenuity it can get. Our resources – combined with those of our state, tribal and local partners – pale in comparison to these challenges.

EPA will need new partnerships to confront new challenges. One of our most innovative collaborations has been with metal platers, like Dan Durkiewicz of Phoenix, who have dramatically reduced the hazardous waste generated by their operations.

Urban sprawl, traffic jams and increased vehicle miles travelled are creating new air quality and water runoff problems.

Our pledge to the residents of the Pacific Southwest is that we will keep on building bridges, keep on looking for innovative solutions, and keep on achieving the results that have made our region a better place to live.

We've seen what a difference 30 years can make. By working smarter with new tools of technology and information sharing, and new partnerships – in addition to our traditional regulatory and enforcement tools – we can make an even greater difference for the environment in the next 30 years.

Pacific Southwest are down 75% from a decade earlier, according to EPA's Toxic Release Inventory. Superfund's 650th construction completion, at MEW site in Mountain View, CA, marks halfway point for cleanup of nation's roughly 1,300 Superfund sites.